MEDWAY BRIDGES

Eight Historic Prints

Kent County Council 1978

MEDWAY BRIDGES

Eight historic prints published on the occasion of the opening of the new bridge at Maidstone, 1978

with text by

Peter Richards

Stella Hardy

Brenda Purle

Kent County Library 1978

ISBN 090 515 522X

Printed by Cotswold Collotype Co. Limited, Wotton-under-Edge, Glos.

ROCHESTER CASTLE AND BRIDGE.

KENT.

THE MEDIEVAL STONE BRIDGE: ROCHESTER

The medieval stone bridge which spanned the river at Rochester was about forty yards upstream from the present bridge, and was built by Sir Robert Knollys and Sir John de Cobham between 1387 and 1392. These two gentlemen also petitioned parliament to allow the appointment of Bridge Wardens and the endowing of the new bridge with lands so that it would be kept in a state of good repair for all time.

Prior to this the upkeep of the bridge had been in the hands of no fewer than 53 riverside parishes and manors.

The bridge, 566 feet long and 15 feet wide, had eleven pointed arches. It was equipped with a drawbridge between the sixth and seventh pier from the Rochester end and a "Wyndynghous".

The fact that the bridge remained intact for 470 years was mainly due to the massive nature of its construction, and to the tireless efforts of the Bridge Wardens who organised the repair work as well as managing the income from the Bridge Estates. Ten thousand elm trees were used to build its foundation of 20 feet long iron-shod piles.

The bridge was altered in various ways during its life, the most important in the later centuries being the increasing of its width by twelve feet and the two central arches being thrown into one. The iron railings were replaced by a stone balustrade in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The bridge was demolished by the Royal Engineers in January 1857.

Tombleson del.t

G.Hawkins sculp.

AYLESFORD,

KENT.

AYLESFORD BRIDGE

There was possibly a crossing place at Aylesford from very early times, on an ancient trackway. There is evidence of Roman occupation in the area – Roman tiles and tufa in the walls of the church above the bridge, and the Roman Villa at Eccles – and also of earlier peoples, in a Belgic cremation burial. The final defeat of the Britons under Vortimer, son of Vortigern, in the fifth century by Hengist and Horsa and their Saxon army is thought to have taken place here and also the defeat of Danish invaders by Alfred and by Edmund Ironside. It was still important in the 17th century; during the Civil War, Lord Norwich sent a force of a thousand men to protect the crossing when Fairfax was advancing on Maidstone.

It was probably on the route of the pilgrims to Canterbury. In the year 1240, Sir Richard de Grey, Lord of Cudnor, founded the Carmelite Friary just downstream from the bridge on the right bank. This foundation, the first Carmelite foundation in England, was dissolved by Henry VIII and the buildings granted to Sir Thomas Wyatt. In 1951 nearly two thousand pilgrims attended at the re-dedication of the buildings, much altered by the successive owners, to which the Order had at last returned.

The bridge is a very fine medieval structure (probably replacing a wooden one) thought to date from the 13th century. It is not known who built it but there may be a connection with the Friary as in 1370, when the bridge was found to be 'broken', the verdict at the inquest was that no one was liable, as it had always been repaired by the alms of those crossing. It has a narrow roadway, with refuges for foot-passengers; originally of six arches, its two centre ones were rebuilt into one long span to allow free passage for barges.

OLD MAIDSTONE BRIDGE.

OLD MAIDSTONE BRIDGE

The Great Bridge of Maidstone (so-called to distinguish it from the smaller bridge over the River Len, in Stone Street) probably was built in the 14th century. William Lambarde could find no records of its building but a coin of Edward II's reign was found buried in the masonry when the bridge was demolished. It was probably built by one of the Archbishops of Canterbury, who were not only the owners of the Palace but also lords and patrons of the whole town and church; Samuel Ireland suggested that either Archbishop Ufford or his successor, Simon Islip, built it. Until the 18th century, the bridge carried six small almshouses (maintained by the Fraternity of Corpus Christi) which had one small room with a garret over.

Drawn by W. Westall, A.R.A.

Engd. by E. Finden.

MAIDSTONE BRIDGE.

MAIDSTONE BRIDGE

At first Maidstone bridge had nine low pointed arches but these were later altered to five semi-circular ones, no doubt to make them easier for the passage of boats; the date of this re-building is not known. In the late 18th century the bridge was falling into decay and in 1808 it was repaired and the roadway widened from 19 feet to 37 feet; much of the eastern end was renewed. However, further decay made it unsafe and eventually a new bridge (the present one), designed by Sir Joseph Bazalgette the engineer of the Thames Embankment and the London Sewers, was built alongside it in 1879 and the old bridge was then demolished. For a short time Maidstone had two bridges side by side; now once more this is so, but this time the partnership is to be permanent.

Tombleson's del. *T.Bishop sculp.*

EAST FARLEIGH,
KENT.

London, Published by Tombleson & Co. 11. Paternoster Row
Germany, Creutzbauer & Co. Carlsrhue.

EAST FARLEIGH BRIDGE

It was over East Farleigh bridge that Fairfax brought his troops when he attacked the Royalist forces in Maidstone. The rising of the Kentish cavaliers in 1648 was led at first by Edward Haleo, squire of Tunstall, but leadership was later given to the more experienced Lord Holland and the Earl of Norwich. When the advance of the Parliamentary troops was sighted, the latter sent men into Maidstone and to Farleigh and Aylesford bridges. The forces at East Farleigh were quickly overcome and the Parliamentarian pressed on into the town.

It is considered that East Farleigh bridge is probably the finest medieval bridge in the south of England and is a perfect example of medieval design and workmanship. The four arches are pointed and have five narrow champered stone ribs beneath their curve. This is a practice which was confined to certain localities and is thought to have been a method of saving much of the timber framework to hold the arch stones during construction until the insertion of the key stone.

The bridge which probably dates from the 14th century has the massive cut-waters on each side but no provision has been made for refuges for foot passengers, although the road way is only 11 ft wide. The approach at both ends is very steep and that on the southern side is made more awkward by the road coming in at an angle; this problem has been cleverly solved by the construction of an extra small arch springing, at an appropriate angle, from the crown of the last main span.

Tomblesons del.

TEESTON BRIDGE.

KENT

TESTON BRIDGE

Teston Bridge is a fine example of medieval work. Originally, according to Samuel Ireland, it had seven arches – the three main ones Cycloidal, the others Gothic; now, after a rebuilding in the early 19th century, there are six. The massive cut-waters provide also very necessary refuges for travellers on foot across the bridge, for the road is only ten feet wide. Built of Kentish ragstone, it is probably of the same date as the bridges at Yalding and Twyford. Both Teston and West Farleigh, the villages at either end of the bridge, are pre-Conquest settlements – Teston from Belgic times.

In a strikingly picturesque setting, in the Three Bell Vale, the bridge is liable to flooding; in Edward Hasted's time the waters of the river which then probably ran at a lower level, would rise perhaps 18 feet in 24 hours and make the bridge impassable. A Teston man, Thomas Spoon, in 1526 left money by his will to keep the bridge in repair.

Barham Court, Barham House or Teston House, the big house overlooking the vale, was at one time in the possession of the Barham or Bearham family, who were previously known as FitzUrse. Randall FitzUrse was one of the four knights who struck down Thomas a Beckett in Canterbury Cathedral.

The house later passed to the Boteler family; Sir William who inherited in 1634 was one of the gentry who presented to the King in 1642 the famous Kentish Petition for peace; as a result his lands were sequestered, the house sacked and he himself imprisoned for six months. The present house owes its appearance largely to the improvements carried out by Mrs. Elizabeth Bouverie after she inherited it in 1772.

Brandtbridge Aylesford Lathe.

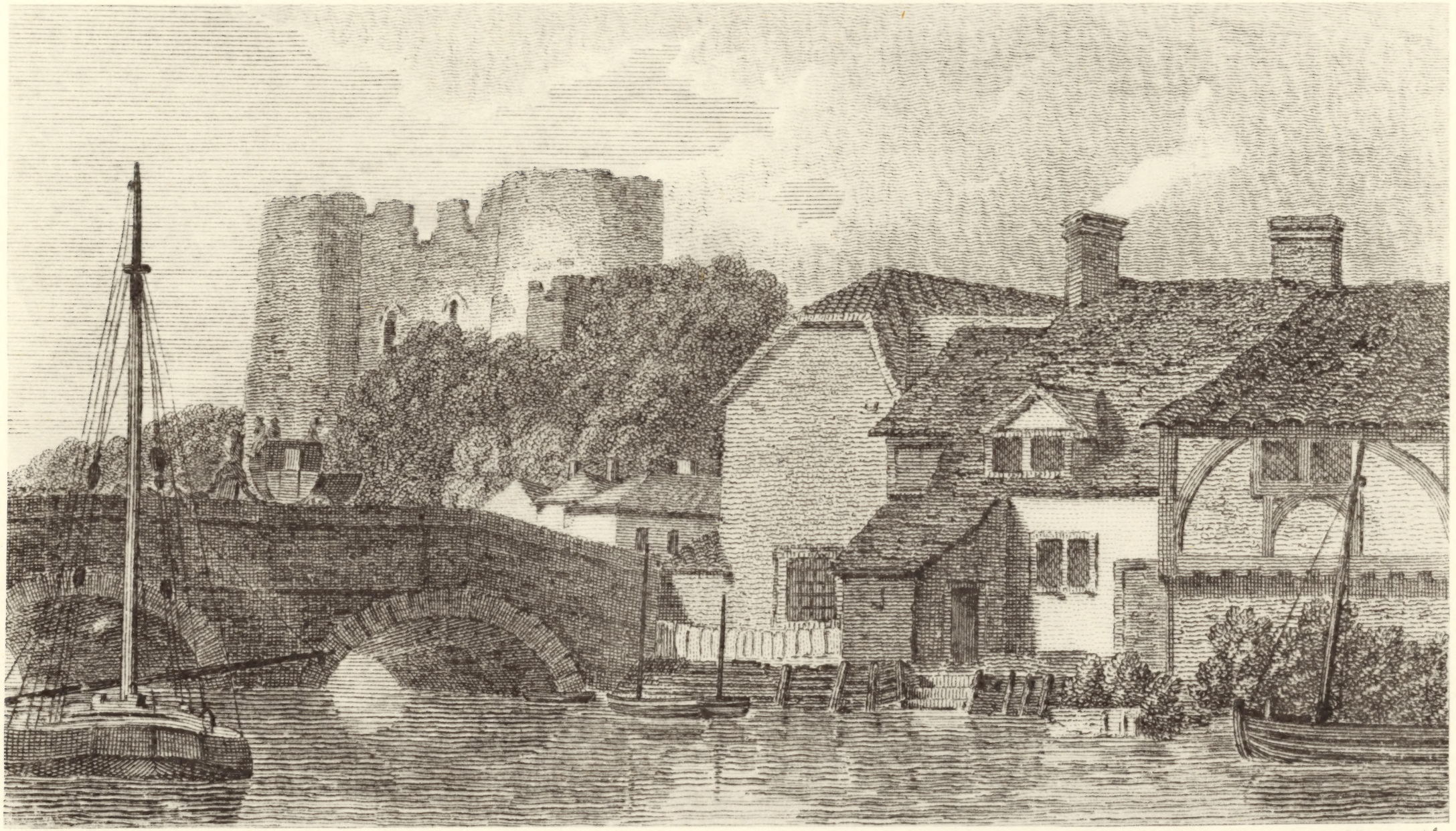
BRANDBRIDGE

The present bridges of stone and iron at Brandbridges are just south of East Peckham, on the road between Mereworth and Paddock Wood; these were erected by Kent County Council in 1906, when the old bridge was demolished. There had been a crossing of the Medway here for many centuries, as the place lay on a well-used route from London, through Farningham, to the Weald; before the reign of Henry III, there was no bridge here, only a ford. A bridge existed, however, in 1325, when an inquest was held to determine who was responsible for the upkeep; the verdict was that no one was bound to repair it.

There was a mill downstream of Brantebrigge for several centuries. In 1751 the miller was in conflict with the Medway Navigation Company, a dispute which eventually ended in the defeat of the Company and which cost them several thousand pounds.

A later owner was Henry Boorman, a mill-hand (former stone-dresser) who had married the owner's daughter; his own nephew became a director of the Navigation Company and gained control. During this time the headquarters of the company was at Brandbridges for all practical purposes. Eventually, however, the peace was broken again when the uncle and nephew themselves came to disagreement. The wharf at Brandbridge was used by the iron-foundries in the Weald for the transportation of this product; a lock was built on the downstream side of the bridge.

Ireland's aquatint of the medieval bridge in 1793 shows one small pointed masonry arch, a massive cut-water and then one main span crossed by a timber construction, which was probably some sort of "draw-bridge" to allow barges to pass through more easily.



Turner, del. *Murray, sculp.*

TUNBRIDGE.

TONBRIDGE BRIDGE

The Medway spreads itself out at Tonbridge into various streams and tributaries and there has always been a need for more than one bridge over the river. Tonbridgians, however modest their contemporary bridges may have appeared to outsiders, have tended to refer to the main bridge as The Great Bridge, and this print shows the structure raised during 1775–6. This had three arches and a stone parapet, and it replaced a narrower five-arched bridge which had proved increasingly inconvenient and obstructive to the considerable traffic. The Medway was made navigable as far as Tonbridge by 1742 and from then until the coming of the railway a century later the town was in effect a busy little inland port.

This view is of the East (Maidstone) side of the bridge and shows it as it might have been before 1818, when work began on repairs and on replacing the parapet by railings. The bridge itself was replaced by the present bridge which was formally opened on 19th September, 1888.

When this print appeared in the Ladies Pocket Magazine (1825–1839) it would probably have been so included for romantically antiquarian rather than for strictly topographical reasons. Although a pleasant picture, it would seem that considerable artistic licence has been exercised. A gentleman's house, built to the right of the Castle gateway in 1793, is not shown, nor is the Castle mound to its left (older than the Castle and still in situ!) The square tower-like shape shown amidst the trees is perhaps intended to represent a smaller tower which once stood at the corner of the Castle wall but was probably demolished before this particular bridge was built. By omitting the Castle mound the artist has been able to emphasise the mast of the barge – but this is not noticeably a Medway barge.

The building on the river bank to the right of the bridge belonged to the Wise family, woodturners – from whom Tunbridge Ware originated.